

Wetland Awareness

Since 1970, when grassroots groups in the United States organized themselves to demand clean air and water in their communities, the annual Earth Day, April 22, has evolved into a commitment by governments, organizations and individual citizens to protect the global environment. This year, the U.S. Embassy in India screened films on the history of the environmental movement and on water cleanup programs to business people, students and journalists. Posters were distributed to focus on wetlands—marshes, swamps, bogs, vernal pools, floodplains, and other wet habitats. Interior wetlands are located where surface water collects or where underground water rises to the surface. Coastal wetlands are created by tides. A spectacular diversity of bird and mammal species rely on wetlands for food, water and shelter, especially during migration and breeding. Wetlands are essential to human existence as well, providing:

- Flood control: Holding heavy rainfall to prevent possible flooding downstream;
- Clean water: Filtering excess nutrients and pollutants before runoff reaches open water;
- Groundwater replenishment: Recharging underground aquifers that billions of people depend on for drinking water;
- Shoreline stabilization: Protecting against erosion as wetland plants hold soil in place and absorb the energy of waves;
- Climate change mitigation: Storing significant amounts of carbon that, if released by the destruction of wetlands, could contribute to global warming;
- Economic benefits: Providing natural products such as fish and shellfish, timber, edible plants, and medicines derived from soils and plants. □



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